



Coast Guard Station Welcomes New Arrivals

Recent arrivals at the U.S. Coast Guard Station in St. Ignace include (from left) Victor Phillips, a Boatswain's Mate Second Class from Orenco, Oregon; Maranda Yarger, a Boatswain's Mate Third Class from Holt, Michigan; Yshaia Dare, a Seaman Boatswain's Mate from Denver, Colorado; Alessandro DiMaio, a Seaman from San Juan, Puerto Rico; Tate McDaniel, a Chief Boatswain's Mate from Rogers, Arkansas.

High Costs Reported for Inmate Medical Care

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MAAA President George Ford told *The St. Ignace News* August 1 that a new telephone was purchased to replace a broken phone at the shelter a month ago, using the same telephone line and number. "This is the same phone line as always, we just purchased a new phone because the old one was inoperable," Mr. Ford said. "The Association paid for it and did not charge the county anything."

An older phone previously used at the shelter, that included numbers pre-set by Mr. Robach, remains installed on his desk, although it was removed for a day or two, Mr. Ford said. One letter was opened, which came addressed to the animal shelter and was from a couple who had made past donations, and upon opening it, shelter staff found it was headed with Mr. Robach's name inside. The letter, he said, was given to Mr. Robach.

Mr. Ford did not attend the County Commission meeting. "It's a mind game going on between the two parties," said Mr. Leveille at the meeting last week, referring to MAAA and Mr. Robach. "The thing is, it's got to stop. Mary Kay is sending out the letter, and if that doesn't do it, we have a special meeting and bring them in here."

In a related matter, Commissioners agreed to give Mr. Robach an increase in salary, from \$5.37 an hour to \$7.42 per hour. The additional \$2.05 is in the current budget as part of a two-person insurance premium that had included his late wife.

Commissioners said at the meeting they are concerned about

the rising cost of medical care for county jail inmates. Through May 12, the county has been charged \$43,807 for medical costs for inmates, but the county only spent \$26,600 all last year and only budgeted \$25,000 for this year.

"I'm going to take this on as a project," said Mrs. Nelson of the matter. She told commissioners that Sheriff Scott Strait told her he is not sure why the costs have escalated so high.

"That's not even anybody in the hospital," she said of the charges. "We're talking office calls, office visits, some medical supplies."

Mrs. Nelson said she would look into the matter, "Otherwise, it's going to be \$100,000 without a doubt."

In addition, the Sheriff's Department is using the services of Vital Care home health agency, which includes a nurse visiting the jail.

"That's another bill," said Mrs. Nelson, and not included in the \$43,807 hospital charges. Last month, the cost of Vital Care was \$1,215, she said.

Rod Nelson, CEO at Mackinac Straits Hospital, told *The St. Ignace News* he would attend the next commission meeting to discuss the matter.

"Our billing department is sorting through the issue that goes back to last summer with the county," he said.

Office visits, he said, have more than tripled and emergency room visits have increased by more than 50 percent over 2004.

In other business, Mrs. Nelson requested a copy of the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) by-laws "to see if and how we might put this into a frozen mode, maintain it just very, very lightly to see where we are going as part of the strategic plan." EDC Director Michelle Walk said she would be looking into alternative funding for the organization.

Ms. Walk updated commissioners on Internet hot spots, the county-wide survey results, and the County fact book.

For access to the Internet at several wireless locations in St. Ignace, like the marina and library, the county charges \$1 a minute through the sale of access cards. So far, Ms. Walk said, the EDC has taken in about \$1,000 on the project.

The results are in from the ran-

dom survey sent to county residents last fall, she told commissioners. The fact book the EDC and the Planning Commission have been working on is about 75 percent completed.

Commissioners asked her to give them a presentation on the county-wide survey at the their August 11 meeting.

Undersheriff Darrell Sadler fielded commissioners' questions regarding the two grants. Commissioners decided to support them with the stipulation the two patrol positions remain part-time. The grants are for off road vehicle (ORV) and snowmobile programs for the 2006 budget year and require the county appropriate \$9,564.84 and place it in a reserve account. Commissioners initially were advised the amount would be \$7,900 at their July 15 meeting. The ORV grant is for approximately \$60,000 and is a 100 percent grant. The snowmobile grant is for approximately \$53,000 and is an 85 percent grant. The grants are administered by Department of Natural Resources.

The issue came under scrutiny because the grant included an increase in wages of more than nine percent for two patrol officers. Commissioners were concerned it would become a problem, as they are about to begin contract negotiations with Sheriff's Department employees. The new wage for the ORV and snowmobile officers is \$13.50 per hour, plus a benefit package of \$3.95 per hour. Last year, the officers received \$12.48 per hour with no benefits.

The board renewed a five-year health service agreement with Mackinac Straits Hospital that coincides with the hospital millage. Attorney Charles Brown said the current agreement will expire December 31. The county owns the hospital property, which the hospital leases for one dollar a year in exchange for providing health care services to Mackinac County residents.

Commissioners issued a letter of support for Kathy Peterson, who is planning to build a 20-bed assisted living facility between Church and Chambers streets in St. Ignace. She is working with Rural Development for financing and they require a letter from the city and the county stating a need and showing support.

Commissioners are planning to hold two public hearings beginning at 1:15 p.m. Thursday, August 25, on a county-wide smoking free policy that does not include restaurants, bars, and casinos. A second hearing would be on a Hazardous Materials Mitigation Plan.

The next commission meeting will be a Committee of the Whole Thursday, August 4, at 1:30 p.m., at which commissioners will begin working on the 2006 budget. Their next regular meeting will be Thursday, August 11, at 1:30 p.m. in the commissioners' room at the County Building.

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- #6232 2000 GMC Sierra, Ext. Cab, 4 WD \$15,995
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- #6238 1991 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham, Under 50,000 Miles \$3,995
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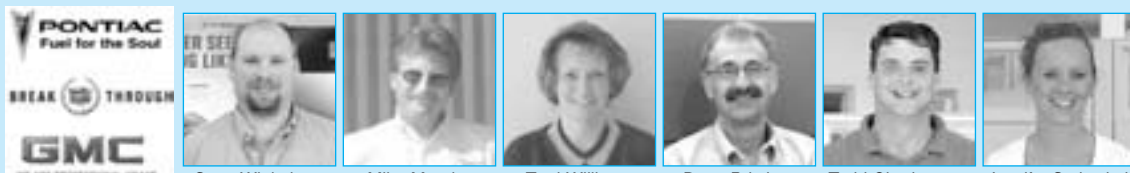
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